

## BLAZING STAR, GAYFEATHER

*Liatris SPP.*

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Blazing Star is a tall and stately plant for bed or border, attractive to the three B's: birds, butterflies (especially swallowtails), and bees. The flowers, unlike most plants, bloom from the top down. Usually growing 1-2 feet tall, some species and cultivars reach 5 feet. The tubular florets range from pink-purple to white; stems are covered with narrow, thin leaves.

Remember to provide full sun and well-drained garden soil; Blazing Star cannot adapt to wet earth. Blooming in summer to early autumn, these plants look fantastic combined with Butterfly weed or Orange Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and ornamental grasses. Cultivars available in nurseries usually bloom in midsummer.

In sandy soils of dry, open woods, especially among pines, you will find Grass-leaved Blazing Star (*Liatris graminifolia*). It is the only species of blazing star known to occur natively on the Middle Neck and the Peninsula. Give it rich organic matter and too much water, and its upright posture becomes floppy. Sessile Blazing Star (*L. spicata*) grows in wet meadows and other moist habitats in counties south of the James River. ❖

